

Elusive publics

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ELUSIVE PUBLICS

Understanding Techno-Scientific Controversy and Democratic Governance
in the GM Crops Debate

Andreas Mitzschke

1. In public controversies about the risks and benefits of genetically modified (GM) crops, different actor groups construct multiple issue-based publics.
2. Issue-based publics are no fixed entity. They are continuously and sometimes strategically constructed according to the changing issues and objects around transgenic crop technology.
3. When trying to understand the democratisation of techno-science, STS scholars benefit greatly from engaging with political science literature on democracy.
4. When studying the relationship between technological and democratic development in a globalising world from a cultural perspective, the nation state is not an adequate unit of analysis. Instead, it is more fruitful to study the flows of technology and publics not contained by national boundaries.
5. For understanding debates about GM crop toxicological risk assessment, questions about the financial, professional, and material attachments of the actors involved in the debate are as important as issues of method, experimental design, and data interpretation (cf. chapter 2).
6. In cases of scientific disagreement and uncertainty, the assessment of the reliability and trustworthiness of scientific knowledge is complicated by varying definitions of how to draw the boundary between science and politics (cf. chapter 2).
7. The imaginaries different actors construct in the debate about GM crops are normative visions of what is 'good' for society. Such visions are based on present interpretations of the past that get projected into the future (cf. chapter 3).
8. European publics can learn from Indian publics about the heterodoxy of democratic discourse and engagement (cf. chapter 4).
9. The knowledge created in public debate about genetically modified crops is caught in a paradox: Despite efforts to democratise policy-making on GM crop technology through public engagement exercises, policy-makers favour scientific expert knowledge to justify their decisions (cf. chapter 4).
10. The path of the researcher resembles the path of the yogi: only continuous engagement with the practice can bring light into darkness.